DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 056 851 RE 003 932

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TITLE A Humanistic Approach to Accountability in Reading Instruction.
PUB DATE Dec 71
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the National Reading Conference, Tampa, Fla., Dec. 1971
AVAILABLE FROM National Reading Conference, Marquette University, 1217 W. Wisconsin Ave., Milwaukee, Wis. 53233

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Behavioral Objectives; *Educational Accountability; Individualized Instruction; Individualized Reading; Reading Diagnosis; *Reading Instruction; Reading Programs

ABSTRACT

Accountability can be applied to reading instruction by matching instructional intent to the results in terms of observable learner accomplishment. An approach to accountability, based on Bloom's concept of student mastery of subject matter, consists of six components which the student passes through in the reading instructional process: (1) rationale: the learner perceives the importance of instruction to his own needs and goals; (2) diagnosis: preevaluation helps determine the learner's abilities and subsequently the learning objectives he needs to pursue; (3) objectives: specific performances are outlined to show the student what the instruction will teach; (4) alternate learning activities; a variety of methods, media, levels, and types of learning activities are employed to suit instruction to the student; (5) post-evaluation: to inform the student and the instructor whether instruction has succeeded in enabling the student to intentions to be reciprocated. The findings showed that both O's intent and the learning activities are modified according to feedback from the learners. In this program, individualized segments are short, learners can take as much time as necessary to master the objectives, and instruction is characterized by appropriate practice, positive reinforcement, and immediate knowledge of results. References are included. (AL)

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A Humanistic Approach to Accountability in Reading Instruction

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RE003 932

A paper presented at the National Reading Association, Tampa, Florida, December 4, 1971.

Introduction

The concept of accountability is attracting interest in the field of education across this Nation at an explosive rate. This year, the New York State Education Department has engaged in studies of the teacher licensing system to determine how the license can be tied more closely to performance on the job. (10) By March, 1971, sixteen states were developing means for performance-based certification of school personnel. (11)

A survey by the New Careers Development Center at New York University revealed programs underway that are attempting to identify precisely what skills a teacher needs in order to facilitate learning and how to measure such skills. (12)

Washington, Minnesota, and Ohio have made substantial strides toward performance-based certificaion. The Washington State Department of Education has developed specifications for teacher certification based on demonstrated competency in the classroom. (13)

Accountability applied to reading instruction is defined in this paper as the matching of instructional intent to the results in terms of observable learner accomplishment.

National Need

Demands of increasingly impatient communities and requirements of our highly complex, technological, and dynamic society, which has little need for masses of unskilled and undereducated citizens, greatly contribute to a shift of emphasis from the teacher to the learner. In addition, society is dissatisfied

with the ever-growing number of people on welfare rolls -- and the vast waste of human potential this represents. Given effective instruction, these people might contribute to the economic growth of this country. Along these lines, Don Davies contends that:

> " . . . every citizen pays a price in money, in uncertainty, in fear, and in social problems for the school failures, the dropouts, the undereducated. The price we pay as a nation is so heavy that we are forced to move or to face disaster." (5)

Can we as educators deny that failures within the educational system have contributed to the fact that over a million young people in this nation are unskilled and undereducated because they dropped out, were pushed out, or received a high school diploma although lacking skills necessary to effectively participate in our society?

Is it surprising that school bond issues fail when a full one-third of the youth with high school diplomas failed the Armed Forces Qualification Test -- even though this test is constructed at the fifth and sixth grade reading levels?

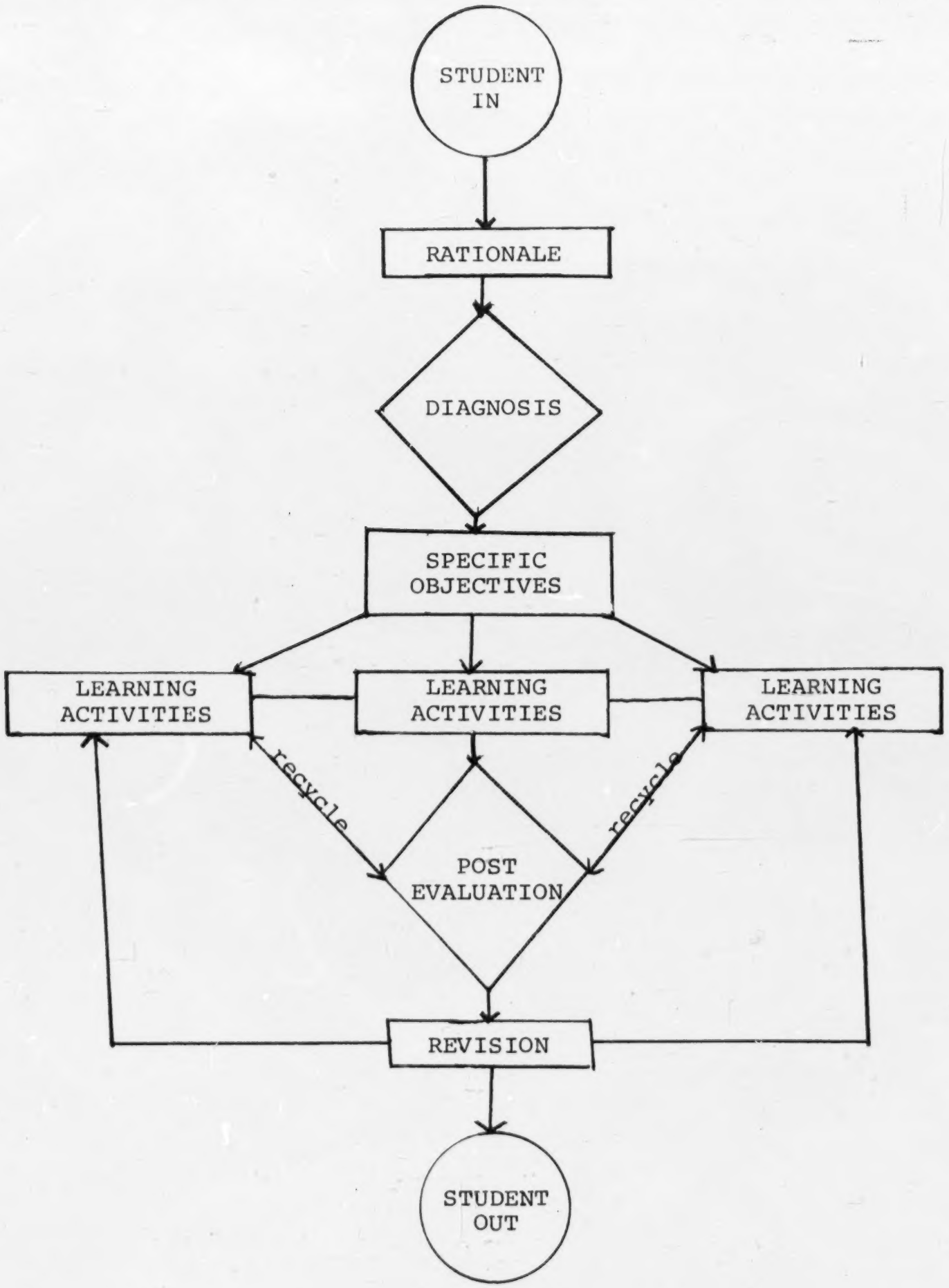
From the White House to the ghetto, the message is clear: education must change. Leon Lessinger puts it succinctly: "Our schools must assume a revised commitment -- that every child shall learn." (7)

In theory, educators agree that each human being is a unique individual. Yet, many of us proceed with business as usual: common instructional procedures, common scheduling, common basals and other testbooks, and common examination dates which commonly result in the sometimes permanent labeling of human beings as A, B, C, D, or F.

A Suggested Approach

This approach, at the practical level, accomodates varying human characteristics while suggesting a route to accountability in reading instruction. It is a framework, not a method. This approach can be implemented by any instructor concerned with learner achievement in reading; it is applicable at all levels up and down the educational ladder. Instructors willing to be accountable for learner achievement in reading will find in this approach sound and organized direction. People-centered, this framework accommodates most methods and materials and provides for individual differences in pace, styles of learning, motivation, and needs.

The theoretical base for this approach is Benjamin Bloom's concept that the grade of "A" as an index of student mastery of a subject can be achieved by up to 95 percent of the students in any class, given appropriate types of help and sufficient time. (1)


STUDENT IN
RATIONALE
DIAGNOSIS
SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES
LEARNING ACTIVITIES
LEARNING ACTIVITIES
LEARNING ACTIVITIES
recycle
recycle
POST EVALUATION
REVISION
STUDENT OUT

This diagram shows the route over which the learner proceeds in the reading instructional process. The components are the rationale, diagnosis, objectives, alternate learning activites, post-evaluation, and revision.

The Rationale

It is here chat the learner perceives the importance of learning to read as the act of reading directly affects his individual needs and aspirations. The omission of a rationale or purpose can cause reading instruction to be regarded by the learner as the same "old red tape" rather than as a meaningful experience.

Diagnosis

A diagnosis precedes formal reading instruction. This pre-evaluation helps to determine the learner's capabilities and disabilities. It dictates the specific objectives to pursue. The diagnosis then reveals "where the learner is" and allows him to begin instruction at that point.

Objectives

Specific objectives are a must for the implementation of accountability in reading instruction. Objectives for reading instruction, primarily cognitive (mental processes) and affective (feelings and attitudes) should be stated in performance terms to specify exactly what it is that the learner is expected to do after instruction that he could not do before. It must be remembered that here the instructor is specifying that which a particular incidence of instruction can effect. Unanticipated outcomes of instruction are infinite.

It is the objective that establishes the intent of instruction and dictates the measures through which this intent can be matched to results. Specifically, objectives make it possible to collect evidence of a change in learner performance thereby verifying the effectiveness of instruction.

Alternate Learning Activities

Since schools exist for instructional purposes, they must be accountable to a society that invests millions of dollars in them for this purpose. The mere presentation of content by an instructor is not synonymous with student learning. (3)

A variety of activities leading to objective attainment is suggested. Each learning activity is a means rather than an end.

Instruction should occur in small segments, and learner achievement should be monitored at the completion of each segment. Opportunities for much practice, appropriate for the performance specified in the objective, should be provided. Popham suggests that following the diagnosis and objectives, "The most important learning principle is that the student must have an opportunity to practice the kind of behavior implied by the objective." (9)

Multi-media, which are employed on the basis of their effectiveness in specific learning situations, are integral components of this approach. (16)

Documentation of the value of multi-media is found in the United States Navy's studies, which suggest that visual displays are 22 times more effective than auditory signals alone

in transmitting impulses to the brain. (15) The effective use of multi-media is, therefore, important.

Immediate knowledge of results and positive reinforcement must also be built into the learning activities. Teaching is causing learning (4); if no learning occurs, the learner can take an alternate route to the objective without penalty.

Post-Evaluation

"If something is worth teaching, isn't it worth knowing if we have succeeded? (8) John Tyler contends that:

> " . . . since educational objectives are essentially changes in human beings, that is, the objectives aimed at are to produce certain desirable changes in the behavioral patterns of the students, then evaluation is the process for determining the degree to which these changes in behavior are actually taking place . . . it implies that evaluation must appraise the behavior of students." (14)

The evaluation process suggested for this approach is at variance with traditional measures which employ the normal curve. The normal curve, as a means of evaluation, assesses individual learner performance in relation to the performance of other learners. Students are sorted; aptitude is viewed as the capacity for learning; the normal curve is a guide for grade assignments; and testing is used to categorize learners.

A humanistic approach requires a criterion-referenced evaluation process. A performance standard is established, and the individual is evaluated with respect to his ability to perform as specified by the standard. Aptitude is defined as the length of time required to master the objective. (2) Instruction is adapted to the individual learning rates, and testing is used to assess teaching. A grade of "F", therefore,

means instructional failure, not student failure.

Revision

Revision is an important part of this humanistic approach, for it is here that the instructor can change or modify learning activities until the learner can perform as dictated by the objective. Revision is based on a clearly defined process of obtaining feedback from the learner. Analyzing error-rates and interviewing learners are the most widely used methods for collecting revision data.

It is also important that the instructor assess learner attitude toward reading. Research on the affective domain is receiving more attention today than ever before. Educators realize that a major portion of educational failure is attributed to negative attitudes. (6)

Summary

A humanistic approach to accountability in reading instruction can be implemented:

1. When instruction is individualized and includes a rationale, diagnosis, performance objectives, alternate routes to learning, post-evaluation, and revision;
2. When learning activities are organized into short segments and characterized by appropriate practice, positive reinforcements, and immediate knowledge of results;
3. When the learner can take as much or as little time as he needs to master an objective without penalty and is provided appropriate types of help;
4. When criterion-referenced measures are dictated by specified objectives.

This framework allows the instructor to have a clear view of responsibility for what, to whom, and the means for measuring the results. Thus, this approach, humanistic in design,

provides a route to accountability in reading instruction at any level within the teaching-learning process.

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